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Don't Reject Whole Peace Offer

THE CENTRAL Intelligence Agency may well be right in suggesting that the new peace plan proposed by the Communist side in Paris is aimed at embarrassing the United States and encouraging the opponents of President Nguyen Van Thieu in Saigon.

Even if that should be so, the best response would not be to dismiss the proposal out of hand but to try to determine whether the plan or any part of it may not also offer a genuine opportunity for peace.

In negotiations it can sometimes prove fruitful to use the other side's proposal as a means of achieving one's own objective.

During the Cuban missile crisis, for example, President Kennedy decided to place the most favorable possible interpretation on a communiqué from Nikita Khrushchev and acted as though Khrushchev had agreed to something that Khrushchev had not spelled out in the communiqué.

Khrushchev then accepted Kennedy's interpretation. If the stratagem had failed, it would, in any case, have been Khrushchev, and not Kennedy, who had to accept the blame for wrecking an opportunity for peace.

A similar stratagem would be worth

considering in response to the Paris peace proposal. The United States could indicate a favorable response to that part of the proposal concerning return of all U.S. prisoners—from Cambodia and Laos as well as Vietnam—in exchange for the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

If the Communist side then wanted to insist on demands for the sacking of Nguyen Van Thieu and the formation of a coalition government—or for limiting the return of prisoners—it would be the Communist side—*and not the United States*—that would be thwarting a peaceful solution.

ON THE BASIS of an interview given by a top North Vietnamese official in Paris last week, there is some reason to believe that the Communist side would indeed accept a simple plan to return all prisoners in exchange for the withdrawal of all troops.

In any case, the United States would be safe to indicate what it is willing to accept—rather than what it must reject—in the Communist proposal. Even if there is only a small chance that the Communists are ready to reach agreement on a reasonable solution, that chance ought to be pursued with every means at our command.